

Oct 1972
STATINTL

COMMENTARY

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Interrupting its usual silence, the CIA has provided Harper's with a rare public document. It is an official letter of protest against our July cover story, "Flowers of Evil," an extremely compromising report by Alfred W. McCoy about the CIA's complicity in the heroin trade in Southeast Asia. "I trust," writes W. E. Colby, the Agency's executive director, "you will give this response the same prominence in your publication as was given to the McCoy article."

The letter appears below in full, together with Mr. McCoy's reply and the testimony of a former USAID representative who witnessed the CIA's participation in the Laotian drug traffic. This exchange, we hope, throws further needed light on a little-known stretch of the sewer that runs between Washington, Saigon, Vientiane, Pnompenh, and Bangkok.

Beyond all that, we are surprised by Mr. Colby's use of the word "trust." We may well be reading too much into it, but that word, and indeed the whole tone of the letter, suggests that Mr. Colby expected an immediate mea culpa from Harper's. Is the CIA that naïve? Mr. Colby, who once presided over the notorious Phoenix program in Vietnam,* is hardly an innocent. Still, his entire letter reflects a troubling simplicity, an unquestioning trust in the goodness of his own bureaucracy. He asks us to share that trust, whatever the stubborn facts may be. As conclusive evidence of the Agency's purity, for example, he even cites Director Richard Helms' public-relations argument that "as fathers, we are as concerned about the lives of our children and grandchildren as all of you."

Such curious expectations of trust apparently motivated the Agency to ask Harper & Row to hand over the galleys of Mr. McCoy's book, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, from which he drew his magazine article. The Agency declared that it simply wanted to check the book for factual inaccuracies, possible libel, or damage to national security. To deliver this unusual request, the Agency dispatched Cord Meyer, a man with the proper Establishment connections who, as the CIA's overseer of the since-transformed Congress for Cultural Freedom,** might be said to have once been in the publishing business himself. Although the galleys were duly sent to the Agency, the CIA's subsequent complaints about Mr. McCoy's research failed to impress Harper & Row, which has since confidently published the book, unchanged. Apparently there are limits to trust, even among gentlemen.

Although Mr. McCoy won't agree with us, our own reaction to this episode is to feel a certain sympathy for the beset bureaucrats of the CIA, who seem to be impaled on the defensive notion, "The Agency, right or wrong." By definition the CIA finds itself involved with a good many questionable people in Southeast Asia. That is a condition of its mission—a mission it did not invent but simply carries out on White House orders—and we suspect that the public would trust the Agency a good deal more if it either acknowledged the facts or remained silent. Alas, the CIA now seems determined to revamp its image into something like a cross between General Motors and the League of Women Voters. But so endeth our sermon. Let the reader draw his own conclusions.

THE AGENCY'S BRIEF:

Harper's July issue contains an article by Mr. Alfred W. McCoy alleging CIA involvement in the opium traffic in Laos. This allegation is false and unfounded, and it is particularly disappointing that a journal of Harper's reputation would see fit to publish it without any effort to check its accuracy or even to refer to the

public record to the contrary.

Normally we do not respond publicly to allegations made against CIA. Because of the serious nature of these charges, however, I am writing to you to place these accusations in proper perspective and so that the record will be clear.

The general charge made by Mr.

McCoy that "to a certain extent it [the opium trade in Laos] depends on the support (money, guns, aircraft, etc.) of the CIA" has no basis in fact. To the contrary, Mr. John E. Ingersoll, Director of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, in a letter to Representative Charles S. Gubser of California on May 27, 1971

*Phoenix is a campaign of systematic counterterrorism designed to root out and destroy Vietcong sympathizers. As U.S. pacification chief from 1968 to mid-1971, Ambassador Colby headed CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support), which ran Phoenix in cooperation with the South Vietnamese police. Mr. Colby has testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that, in 1969 alone, Phoenix agents "neutralized" 19,534 suspected Vietcong, killing 6,187 of them in the process. Critics argue that Phoenix uses assassination methods and that Mr. Colby's figures are extremely conservative.

**The CCF, among other activities, at one time published a dozen or so serious anti-Communist magazines throughout the world. The best known is *Encounter*, which now has a different sponsor.

MORI/CFE